Famous Artists Course

Famous Artists Schools, Inc., Westport, Connecticut

Advanced pictorial composition

Lesson 14

Albert Dorne

Fred Ludekens

Norman Rockwell

Al Parker

Ben Stahl

Stevan Dohanos

Jon Whitcomb

Robert Fawcett

Peter Helck

George Giusti

Austin Briggs

Harold Von Schmidt

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The meaning of this lesson is well summed up in this painting. In it Norman Rockwell gives us far more than accurate drawing and good composition — he communicates feeling. Emotion, strongly felt and sensitively expressed, gives greater impact and conviction to any picture.

Advanced pictorial composition

The history of success in art is the history of men and women who were able to project their feelings into their paintings — to make pictures that were a record not only of things seen but also of things felt. The Spanish artist Goya, for example, long ago made paintings and etchings of war and its gruesome carnage which mirrored his profound feelings of horror so faithfully that these pictures still move us deeply today. The great paintings of Christ by El Greco, Rembrandt, Leonardo da Vinci, and other old masters are far more than reverent pictures of a religious subject — they are made luminous and holy by the extraordinary feeling with which the artists painted them. Standing before a picture by Vincent van Gogh — whether it be a portrait of a French peasant with baleful, hypnotic eyes, or a picture of a night sky in which each star is a whirling, incandescent storm and each tree a strangely mobile, passionate shape — we cannot help but respond to the burning emotion that the artist experienced for his subjects. All of these pictures have deeper meaning for us because of the feeling the artist poured into them.

The illustrator is not free to give expression to his feelings to the same degree as the gallery painter. Still, he must have real feelings and attitudes toward his subjects and he must reveal them in his work. When Al Parker paints a story illustration showing young lovers embracing, there is a warmth, a sense of closeness in it that Parker can put there only because he identifies with his subject as he paints it. A picture by Stevan Dohanos of a shoe repairman, a fire hydrant, or a box of groceries carries a special conviction because he brings great curiosity and interest to anything he paints. Norman Rockwell owes more than a little of his tremendous reputation to his remarkable ability to communicate his feelings to others through his pictures. We look at his work and feel the joy of the small boy on receiving his first puppy — the shyness of the boy and girl at their first dance — the surprise and respect of the hardened, worldly big-city characters as they see an old lady and a child saying grace in a cafeteria. Rockwell feels deeply what he paints and he knows how to make us feel it, too.

As artists, we must remember that nothing — people, places, or things — is without its feeling or its atmosphere. Everything arouses a response of some kind within us, and suggesting this response in our picture will make it more expressive and believable. The solitude of a lonely beach, the gentle lapping of waves against the shore, the piercing cry of gulls — there are ways of evoking all these things in a picture, as we shall learn in this lesson. The jostling of a big-city crowd, the roar of motors, the squeal of brakes, the smell of fire, or the delicate fragrance of a flower — there are ways of capturing or communicating all these sensations in a drawing or painting.

To show feeling in a picture is, in part, a matter of technical skill. The smooth or rough way we apply our paints or pen strokes, the darkness or lightness of our values, the softness or crispness of edges, the harmony or clash of colors — all of the things that communicate feeling call for skillful handling of the tool and the medium.

To compose our pictures effectively also requires knowledge. We must learn, through study and trial and error, how to arrange forms in the picture area, how to use directional line to group these forms and lead the viewer's attention to the center of interest, how to use value to emphasize the important and subdue the unimportant. To do all of these things takes real experience and a knowledge of the rules — but it takes sensitivity as well. At any point in the making of a piece of art, feeling — the feeling of the artist for his subject, for his medium, and for the emotions and attitudes of the public, which he wants to influence — is of fundamental importance.

So it takes something more than technical skill in drawing and a sound knowledge of composition to succeed as an artist. And this "something more" is the quality we have been stressing here — sensitivity, feeling. The artist must respond to his picture subject physically and emotionally. He must reach out for it with all his senses — touch, scent, hearing, perhaps even taste — and show in his picture what his senses have discovered. He must reach out for his subject with his inner feelings, too — and make his picture reveal to the viewer what the subject means to him in emotional terms. He must make the viewer feel what he has felt.

Only if the artist can project his sense impressions and his emotions into his work will he be able to give it the personal quality, sensitivity, and human feeling that have marked the best and greatest pictures of yesterday and today.

It will sometimes happen that we have to paint a place where we have never been, a building or an object that we have never seen except in a photo. Even so, we can pass along to the viewer the feeling of these things. Imagination is a potent substitute for actual experience. If, for example, we are faced with the problem of picturing a small town in the Old West, we can, in imagination — and that really means by drawing upon all the related experiences we have ever had — feel the dry heat of the sun beating down on the dusty thoroughfare, sniff the choking dust kicked up by a team of horses pulling a creaking stagecoach, and suggest these impressions in our picture.

As human beings, we react to the world around us and to our picture subjects with all of our senses, with a multitude of emotional associations and feelings, with our whole being. As artists, we must catch up these feelings — weave them sensitively into our composition, into our forms, our values and lines — so that the viewer, looking at our pictures, will find in them images that are deeply convincing and meaningful because they are painted with emotional truth.

Lesson **14** Famous Artists Course

Advanced pictorial composition

The symbol and the picture

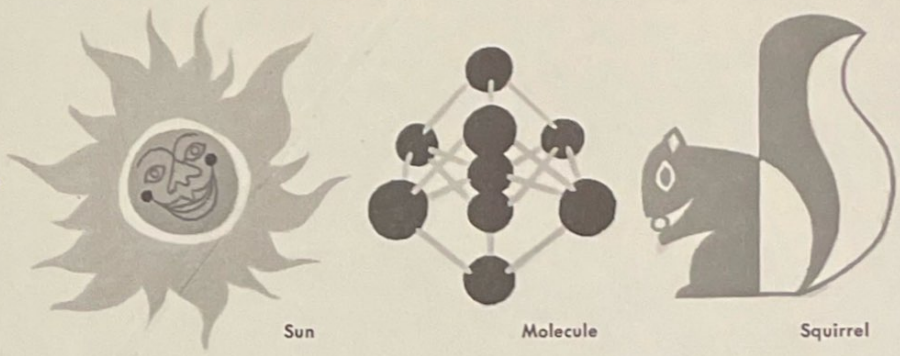
The main purpose of our pictures is to communicate. We have something we want to show to people — an idea, a situation, an emotion, an effect of color, a group of textures, an advertised product. A picture may be many different things, but primarily it is a pictorial message that the artist delivers to the public.

One of the most useful and effective ways to deliver our message is by means of a symbol. We are all thoroughly familiar with symbols. Gangling, bearded Uncle Sam, in his striped trousers, is a symbol of the United States — a pile of coins is a symbol of wealth or money — a six-shooter in a holster is a symbol of a western movie or story. Symbols surround us in just about every sphere of life.

The symbol is a quick, easy means of conveying an idea which is sometimes large and complicated. We might think of the symbol as a sort of a shorthand for the larger thing it represents. Symbols are a quick bridge between people's sight and their understanding. Because symbols are so familiar and meaningful to all of us, they have great value to the artist in making pictures. This value isn't confined just to the ordinary use of a symbol as a symbol. Artistically, its most effective use is as an underlying theme or design for the picture.

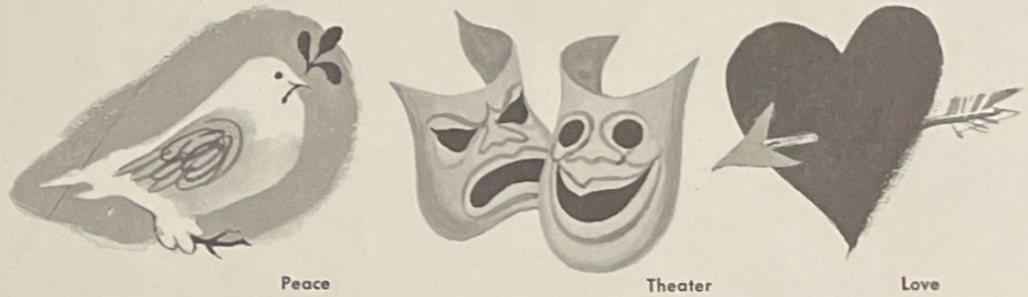
Earlier we saw how symbols can express mood in figure drawings. Now we study the symbol in broader terms and see how it works in relation to composing the whole picture.

There are symbols which stand for the things themselves.



Sun Molecule Squirrel

There are symbols which represent other things.



Peace Theater Love

Some symbols describe feelings.

Sensuous Dramatic Happy

Light and dark are symbols, too.

Values express moods ranging from gaiety to gloom.

As the drawings above suggest, the first and most basic type of symbol is just a simplified version of an object. Here the symbol represents the object itself. Examples are the sun, the structure of a molecule, and the squirrel.

In the second group we can place the symbols which stand for other things or ideas. Examples are the dove of peace, the masks of tragedy or comedy, which represent the theater, and the heart, signifying love.

Another group are the symbols that describe feelings. The soft, flowing curve depicts sensuousness or rest. Explosive lines suggest drama and radiant, raylike lines symbolize cheer.

The tones of light and dark which we have represented here by a value bar are also important symbols. We've touched on value before, but in this lesson we will consider light and dark tones mainly as they suggest moods — ranging from light (happy) through gray (dull or sad) to black (gloomy or mysterious).

Using symbols in different ways

Direct symbol

Here are two examples that fit into our group of symbols which stand for the thing itself. They are used singly and are highly stylized versions of the real object. Still, each symbol tells the whole story — it communicates quick, direct meaning to the viewer.

Courtesy Hastings House, Publishers, Inc.

Rooster

Courtesy Hastings House, Publishers, Inc.

Cogwheel

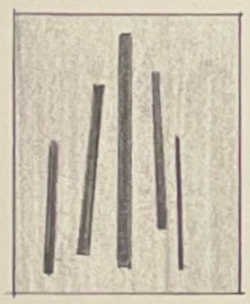
Symbolical

Here are realistic figures used in combination with symbols, which form a kind of background. Al Parker made this nostalgic illustration for a story about a boy who idolized his not-too-bright uncle. The uncle was a jack-of-all-trades, and the many different objects symbolize his background and versatility. For example, the rifle, rabbits, and mounted squirrel tell us that he is a skillful hunter, the fireman's hat that he is a fireman, and the revolver and handcuffs that he is a constable. The symbols are drawn merely as outlines in order to show that they are symbols and exist only in the mind of the boy.

Courtesy Cosmopolitan

Underlying symbolism

This world-famous painting is Norman Rockwell's conception of freedom of speech, one of the Rights of Man. Rockwell has carefully patterned his main character on the vertical symbol of dignity which we encountered in an earlier lesson and which is especially appropriate for this important subject. The artist has arranged the secondary figures so that they are all looking up at the main one, thus emphasizing his stature. To increase the sense of verticality, Rockwell has kept the background behind this figure clear and uncluttered. If he were standing in a somewhat casual position, the feeling of dignity would be completely missing. Always keep mood symbols in mind when you compose a picture.



© The Curtis Publishing Co.

Hamlet — Ben Shahn

Courtesy CBS-TV

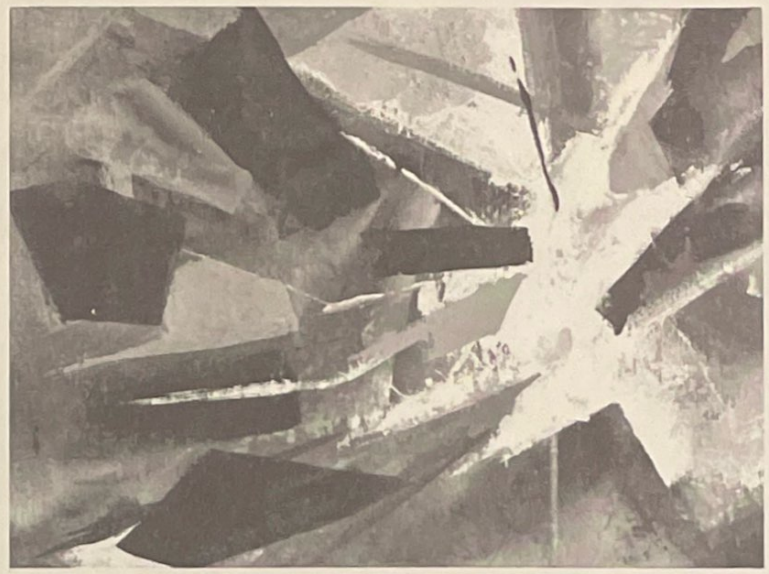
Communicating feeling in a picture

Most people suppose that the artist draws or paints just the appearance of his subject. The best artists, however, do more than that. They re-create the feeling of the subject as well. This emphasis on feeling is at the core of a whole school of painting which is very influential today — the expressionist school. The artists who belong to this group are chiefly concerned with putting down a record of their feelings or attitudes toward their subjects. Naturally, as artists who must keep an audience in mind, we will not go this far — but we will consider how to use feeling to make our pictures more expressive and convincing to others.

The total impression

When we look out at the world — look at the things around us which we plan to put into a picture — we do more than simply see them as a camera would. We experience the subject with all of our senses — with our senses of hearing, scent, touch. From the things our senses tell us we get a certain feeling about the subject, a total impression. For example, the subject may have not just the look, but also the feeling, of fragility or strength, grace or clumsiness. It is this total impression that we must try to get into our picture.

In the following pages we will consider how these sensations or feelings can be translated into visual terms — how they can be put down with pencil, pen, or brush. The effect of these feelings is important because it can add a really professional quality to our work. In fact, a picture which might be accurately drawn and reasonably well composed could still fail to communicate to the viewer or stir an emotion in him unless it did contain this very thing we are speaking of — the sense of the subject as well as its appearance.

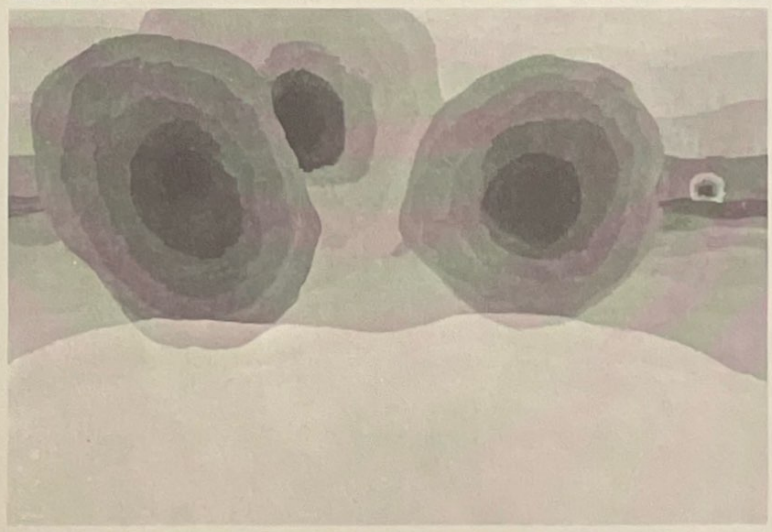


Explosive: This picture was made to suggest an atomic explosion. It gives us a feeling of tremendous blast and concussion.

Tinkling: Thin, brittle shapes have been carefully arranged in the picture space to suggest a sound of tinkling.

Arthur G. Dove

Courtesy Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center



Foghorns: There is a feeling of depth to these forms — one that strongly suggests the loud, hoarse voices of foghorns.

At the same time that we search for the feeling of a subject, we must also be aware that our own inner feelings are equally important – that they in turn determine how the subject affects us.

All of us, far from being impersonal machines, are, more accurately speaking, tangled bundles of nerves, sensitivities, desires, prejudices, hopes, fears, aspirations, affections, memories. Our eyes communicate the outside world to us more or less efficiently. But we can never look at any object without finding that a jangled chain of emotional and mental reactions has been set up inside us. Many of these reactions occur so deep within us that we are hardly conscious of them. Nevertheless, our attitude toward what we see is governed as much by what we bring to the object as by what the object brings to us. It is almost impossible to be completely detached and impersonal. Our underlying feelings project a definite mood over our surroundings, and at different times will make the same subject look good, bad, or indifferent to us. Our sympathy for the subject, our love or hatred for it – our attitude toward it – can sharpen our senses and help us wring everything we possibly can from it.

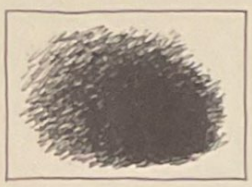
To create a truly expressive picture, the artist must be aware of all these things, both in himself and in his subject. Only then can he really focus on what is before him and see it as an artist – with an intense, unique appreciation that enables him to select what is special and discard what is not – to record his subject personally and creatively and communicate it to others.

As a first step toward learning how to transfer the feel of something to the surface of our picture, let's examine the paintings on these two pages. Each expresses a sound or a fundamental feeling in visual form. Most of these pictures are immediate and natural mind-and-hand reactions, almost as direct and basic as laughing or crying. As you look at each picture, ask yourself what it suggests to you. The great likelihood is that your reaction will be close to the one the painter was trying to produce. These illustrations prove that feelings can really be put down in pictures.

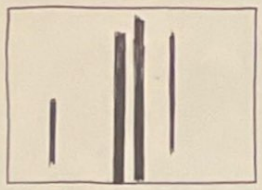
An ominous feeling

Excitement

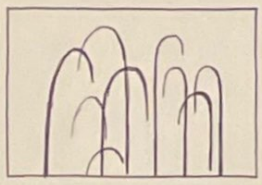
A nervous feeling



Mystery, gloom — low key



Classic dignity — awesome



Despairing, sad — depressed

Excited, frivolous, hysterical

Calm, silent, peaceful

Hopeful, happy, glad

Soft, gentle, rhythmic

Mood in composition — Stahl

Above are a few of the basic symbols used to establish the mood or feeling of a picture. Many other elements besides these symbols are important in establishing a picture's mood. Color, tone, edges, the composition and the objects represented all contribute to a picture's mood. But the basic symbols shown here are starting points, and the effect they create in various mood pictures is easily seen and felt.

An illustration is a combination of a number of these mood symbols. An example of this can be found in the sketch called "Despair," in which we have the drooping forms of despair and sadness combined with the symbol of mystery. These symbols add to and heighten the story told by the action of the figure or figures in the illustration. The symbols establish the mood; the action, locale, and props tell the immediate story.

These symbols are not to be used like a chart. If you try to do this, you will become mechanical in your feeling toward mood. The diagrams above are merely a breakdown of the elements that create mood. As for myself, first I feel the mood of a story and then, through feeling and technique, I transfer that mood to the picture space with the aid of these symbols.

Despair—silence, gloom: In the accompanying text I have explained the elements which make this picture look unhappy. I would suggest that you look around you and see how many of these mood symbols you yourself can find — there are, literally, hundreds of them, with many variations.

Mystery—gloom, excitement: Besides containing various mood symbols, this drawing has an array of strange and weird shapes that wriggle and squirm in a revolting way. The scene, which shows grave robbers at work, demonstrates how one can use props in a picture to make more of the basic symbols. For example, the tree branches seem like clutching hands reaching down into the half-opened grave. Due to their wriggling nature, the branches appear to be moving, to be alive. In mysterious pictures of this sort the use of a black silhouette against light is tremendously effective.

Sensuous—gentle, soft: Naturally, the subject matter of an intimate picture has much to do with the creation of an intimate mood. It is also necessary to use symbols of intimacy in connection with the subject matter in order to communicate the mood more quickly to the viewer. Here the mood is intimate and warm, and therefore all the forms must be soft and yielding except those few necessary straight and angular forms used for contrast. Soft, round forms appear softer and rounder when placed with angular forms.

Excitement—mystery, hysteria: To attain this mood of excitement and hysteria we renounce any suggestion of order in a formal sense. Of course everything is really organized, but in a loose and pliable way. We find very few horizontals and verticals. Things appear jumbled and tossed around like straws in the wind. The forms squirm and twist. The element of mystery (dark) is used to weave wild, jagged patterns around the figures.

Calm, holy—dignified, silent: The calm serenity of this pen drawing is based on two mood symbols — the horizontal line and the vertical line. The horizontal indicates calmness, the vertical indicates dignity and greatness. All these meanings for the vertical and horizontal lines combine and contribute to a feeling of holiness in this picture.

Drama—mystery, excitement: In the case of the dramatic picture we must be careful not to carry things too far. Such a mistake will occur if we show our figures in gestures that are not logical. However, a facial expression can be exaggerated (things must be exaggerated) up to a point and still be in good taste. In fact, let your taste guide your exaggeration. You don't have to worry about exaggerating mood symbols, of course. They can be exaggerated extremely and still be sound. Note how the broken effect of light through the railing creates vibrant excitement and adds to the action of the figures. A picture is a dead thing unless we give it life and movement by the use of forms that throb and live.

Hope—brightness, excitement: Here I have combined the symbol for hope (happy, bright) with the symbol for excitement to create this mood. Notice that the arms of the larger figure repeat the rising lines of the sunrise symbol in the background.

Expressing feeling and mood through value

All of us have basic reactions to tones of light and dark. These reactions are deep-rooted. A small child fears the dark — it suggests mystery, the unknown, to him. By contrast, a bright, sunny day in which everything is perfectly visible dissolves any feelings of fear or mystery. Because light is the condition in which we feel most at ease, we associate it with cheerfulness and gaiety.

A middle or gray tone is another thing, again. The quiet, muted tones of a wet, foggy day, subduing color and tone contrasts, create in us a drab mood, a mood of depression, sorrow or boredom.

Since these are real responses to nature's changing tones, the artist can count on similar responses when he makes appropriate uses of these tones in his pictures. Lightness, grayness, and darkness are among the most effective of symbols. Shades of value create shades of meaning and rank among our most potent compositional tools.

Al Parker

© The Curtis Publishing Co.

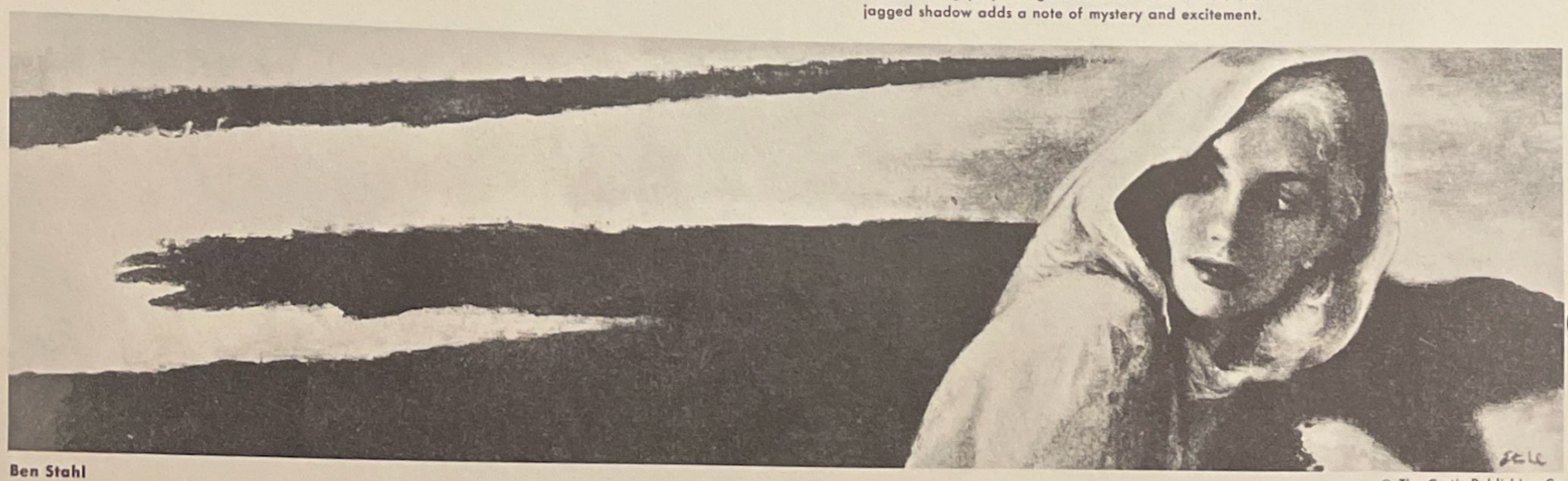
Light and feminine: The whole emphasis in this story illustration is on lightness and femininity. According to the story, the girl shown here reminds everyone who sees her of a flower, and Parker has kept this in mind in establishing his values. Notice the lightness of the clothing, flesh, and background, and how high they raise the over-all tone of the painting. The book and hair are the only areas of middle or low value in the entire picture.

Austin Briggs

© The Curtis Publishing Co.

Sad and gray: A sadness — a gray, troubled mood — are seen very clearly in this picture. The only form that is strong in value is the figure, and even here the tones are muted. This illustration has none of the lightness of the one at the left, or the drama of the one below. It's a reflective scene, a scene of sorrow, and the choice of values has been carefully made to point up this feeling.

Dramatic light and shade: The dark menace of an approaching shadow seems to reach out to seize this girl — and the drama of the situation is emphasized by the strong play of light and dark around her. The jagged shadow adds a note of mystery and excitement.



Ben Stahl

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Austin Briggs

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Dark and foreboding: Here is a grim scene — a man with a necktie in his hands bends over a sleeping girl and prepares to strangle her. Appropriate to the mood of the illustration is the low key, with the figures standing out palely against the dominant dark tones of the setting. Notice how much of the picture area is taken up by the somber, ominous form of the bed. The lightest values establish a strong, contrasting pattern around the center of interest.

Sharp, exciting contrasts: In this dramatic picture the mood is heightened by powerful contrasts of dark and light. The huge dark form of the whale serves as a background for the puny figures of the men in the boat. Particularly noteworthy is the strong diagonal placement of the whale and the boat, creating a zigzag symbol of excitement which is emphasized by the foam.

Ben Stahl

Courtesy John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Co.

"It's rough and heavy — it feels like a pineapple"

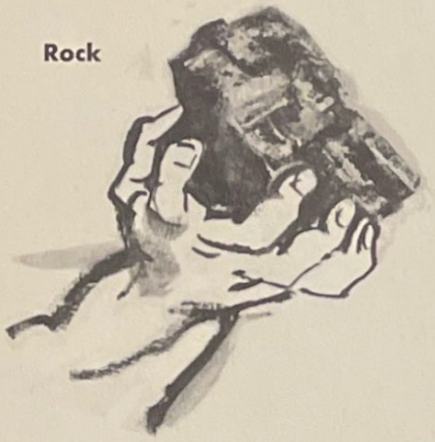
Touch — the feel and weight of things

The photograph at the right highlights the importance of our sense of touch. Thanks to this sense we are able to recognize objects when we cannot see them — or to know them better when we do see them. If we can carry over into our pictures a strong sense of the texture of things — not only of the way they look but of the way they feel — our pictures will be all the more convincing for it.

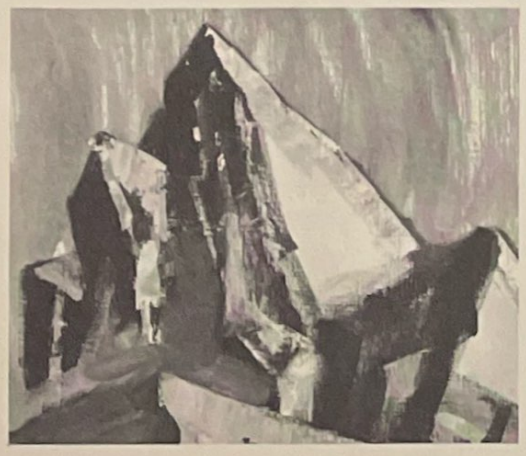
To draw or paint an object well, we must be as familiar as possible with every aspect of it. This means, if practicable, picking the thing up, running one's hand over it, getting a sharp impression of the weight and feel of it. Then, when we take up pen or brush, we must try to re-create this feeling in the picture. We can do this best if we emphasize the specific character of the surface – if we make sure that the rough bark of a tree really appears rough, if we show the fluffy fur of a long-haired kitten as really soft and fluffy.

After we have painted an object or a texture as well as possible, it is important to sit back and look at it, and ask: Does that really convey the rugged hardness of bark? Does this mite of a kitten really look as though it would feel soft and silky and light in the hand? Our pictures should capture these qualities of texture and weight regardless of how accurately we draw the details of the form.

Rock

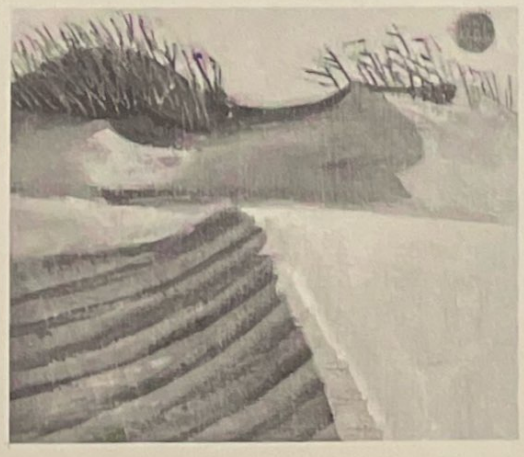


Rugged, hard, solid: When we hold a rock in our hands, we experience its solid, heavy, dense form, its sharp or smooth contours and its weight. Rock is rock — there is no mistaking it for another material. In painting rock, we must think of this feeling of density and hardness and try to re-create it, whether the object is a small stone, as above, or distant mountains, like those below.

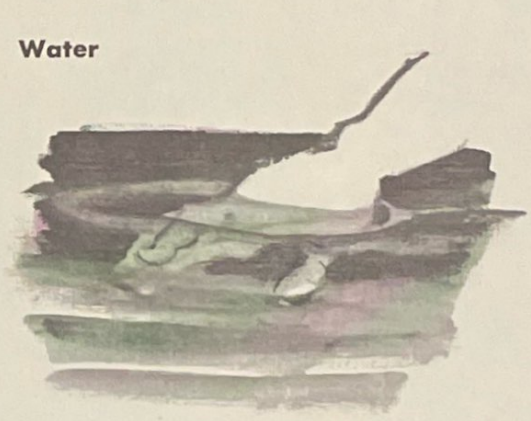


Sand

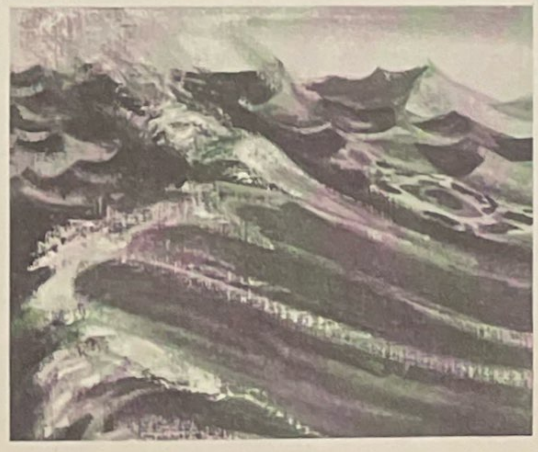
Shifting, granular, smooth: When we pick up a handful of sand and sift it through our fingers, we are made sharply aware of its flexible, smooth, granular qualities. This sense impression has bearing even if we are painting a desert or a stretch of beach, as below. The picture should convey the soft, shifting character of sand — it should not have the feel of grass or rock.



Water



Flowing, liquid, buoyant: Our picture may show a hand testing the temperature of water or it may show a seascape of restless waves — but in each case the basic material is the same. Water is buoyant and liquid and these are the qualities we must try to paint. Here it is often helpful to think of opposites — of the wetness of the water as opposed to the dryness of sand.

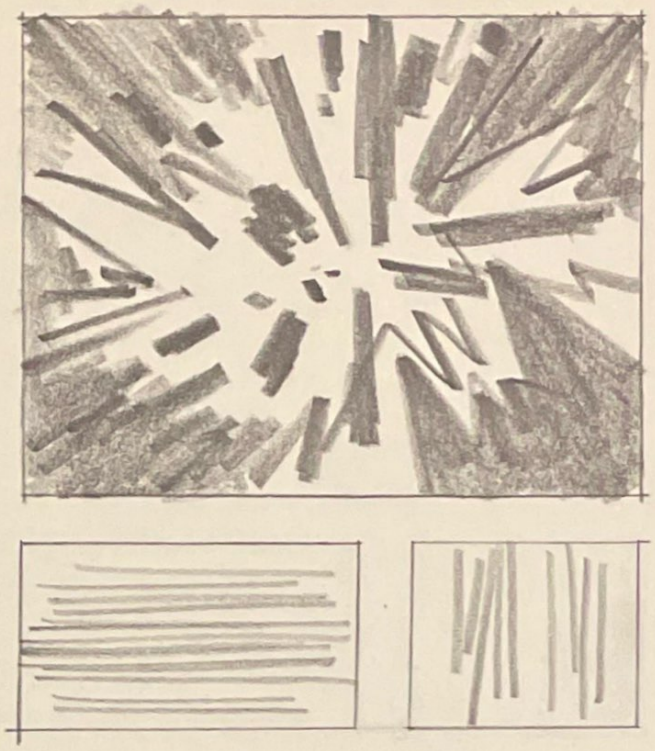


The effect of sound

Long before there were motion pictures with sound, artists were painting pictures that communicated the sensation of sound. We have already seen some examples of how this can be done. At the right there is another, a picture of an explosion, in which a series of coarse, heavy, radiating lines strongly suggest an ear-splitting, shattering noise. Compare these lines with the horizontal and vertical ones of the diagrams below this picture. In the diagrams the effect is quiet or static.

We can apply this principle very successfully in pictures of many different kinds. The impact of sound can be suggested by the angularity and the diagonal quality of the shapes and lines. The effect of quiet is best conveyed by stressing horizontal lines — lines that are quiet, that literally "lie down" — or vertical lines, or a combination of both. Tone can play a part, too. Strong contrasts of light and dark will suggest violent sound, but closely matched values will create a quiet mood.

Carrying sense impressions, such as sound, over into your painting may seem a bit difficult at first. With practice and concentration, however, you can have surprising success. Whenever you draw or paint a picture, think of the sound elements that are present. Try, for example, to "visualize" the noise and tumult of a crowd as opposed to the quiet of a millpond.

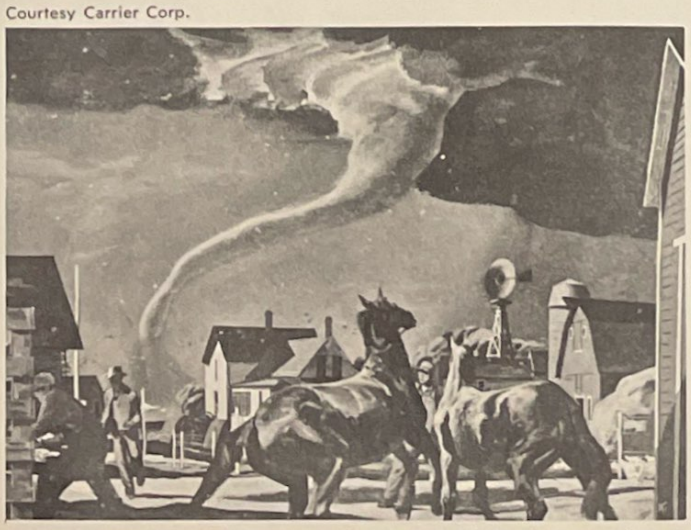


This scene in Wall Street, like the Fawcett picture below, suggests movement and noise. The many different forms and the different directions in which they are moving help to give us a sense of the sounds of people hurrying and the noise of traffic as we experience them in a busy street.

Courtesy Ewing Galloway

Here is the same Wall Street scene on a Sunday morning. There is almost a tomblike quality to the deserted streets and buildings. These two photographs give solid proof that the feeling of sound or silence can be communicated very clearly through visual means.

Courtesy Carrier Corp.



Robert Fawcett's painting of an approaching tornado and Al Parker's picture of a quiet lake offer an extreme contrast in the sounds they suggest. Fawcett has successfully created a feeling of activity and noise — we can almost hear the terror-stricken whinny of the horses, the running sound and shouting of the men, and the howling of the wind as the mighty tornado moves in for its strike.

Parker's lake scene, on the other hand, is completely muted. Even the oars out of water help to emphasize the feeling of silence. To strengthen it, the artist has used very few diagonals or strong, contrasting tones.

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Scent

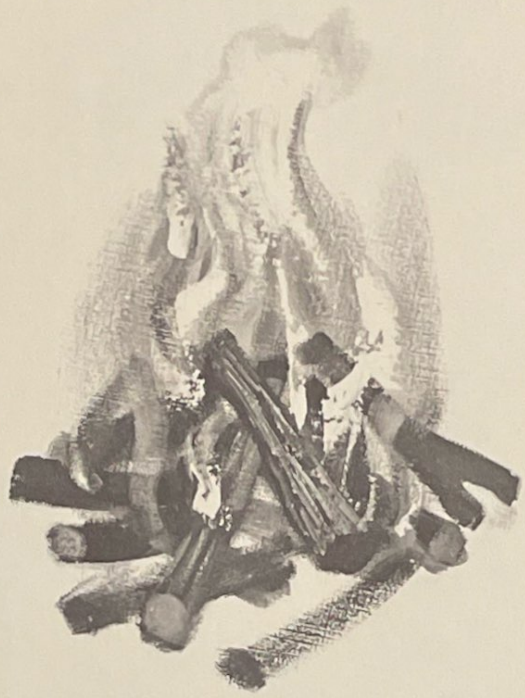
At first this sense might seem far removed from any practical role in making a picture. But, as the illustrations below suggest, the sense of smell enters very strongly into our experiences – and into re-creating them for others to see. Some of our most vivid memories are associated with odors – the pleasant odor of a newly mown field of hay, the fresh, sweet smell of the earth at the end of a summer's shower, the scent of pine in a forest, of burning logs in a campfire, of bacon sizzling in the frying pan. The odor of these things is part of the things themselves, and it is very much a part of our feeling and attitude toward them.

Being aware of the odor of things – whether it is harsh or pleasant, strong or gentle – can help us to interpret them sensitively and convincingly. We will paint roses more delicately if we think of their perfume, and a city dump more realistically if we remember how it smells. The opposite is also true. For example, without the awareness that the smoke that pours from a burning building is acrid and choking, an artist might paint this effect in colors and values that would strike a false note. Keep scent in mind when you paint, and you will experience and re-create your subject with greater feeling.

Rose

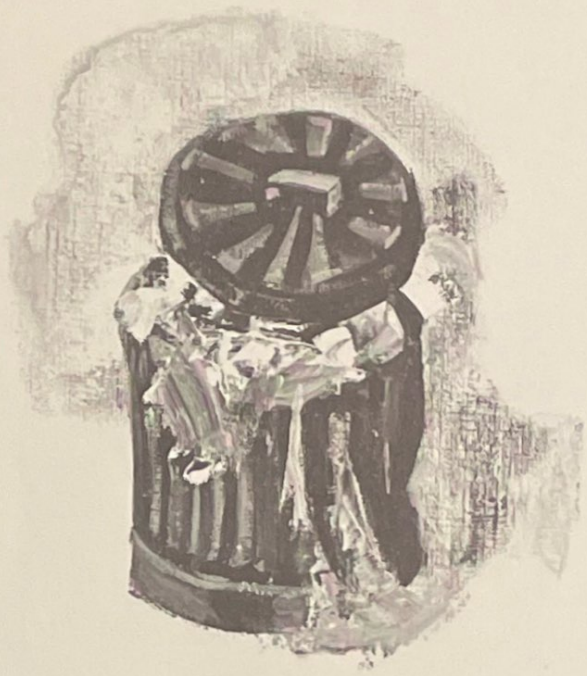
Sweet, fragrant, delicate: A rose has a sweet, delicate perfume — and being mindful of this as we paint the flower can help us portray its personality. In making the painting below, the artist thought of the pleasant, rich fragrance of a whole garden of roses.

Fire and smoke



Pleasant or acrid: The smell of fire and smoke has different associations for us. A friendly campfire has a crisp, fresh smell that we associate with feelings of cheer — with warmth and food and fresh air. Very different is the frightening, acrid smell of a building on fire. In the picture below, our visual reaction to the fire is closely tied to our imagined sensation of how it must smell.

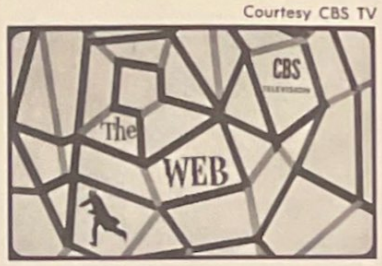
Garbage



Dank, musty, unpleasant: An overflowing garbage pail carries with it powerful and unpleasant associations of smell. Words like "stale," "rancid," "damp," and "rotting" come to mind in a very forceful way. We associate it with old basements, tenements, slum alleys, decay and poverty, as in the scene below. The artist who is painting a scene like this will rely strongly on the element of scent.

See — Observe — Remember

Courtesy CBS TV



George Olden: This "title picture" for a television mystery show is a simple, direct symbol of the program — a web or maze, and a figure trying to escape from it. Communication is instant and clear.

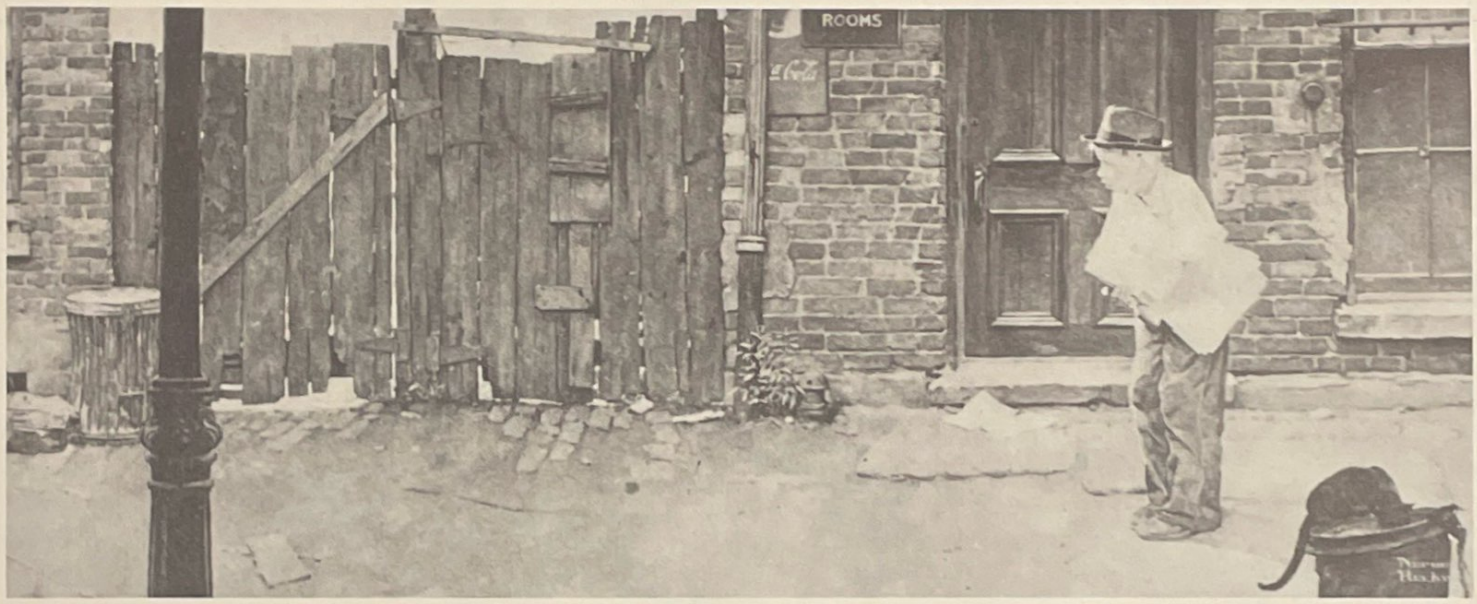
How professional artists use symbols and senses

Look closely at the pictures here. Like most good pieces of art, each of them makes use of some of the principles we have explained so far in this lesson. Before you read the captions, see if you can determine whether these pictures are directly or indirectly symbolic – whether they use pure symbol or there is a recognizable symbol in the composition. See whether the artist made use of senses other than sight, and how much more meaningful each picture is than its subject matter alone could make it.

From now on, look beneath the surface of pictures. Don't settle for the superficialities or even the more important aspects of good drawing and good composition. Try to discover the different compositional means the artist employs – what he uses to compel you to respond to his picture almost as he directs. For example, compare the noise and hubbub of Dorne's fight scene to the silence and quiet textural pattern of Rockwell's picture – the suspended scream and frozen instant of the Fawcett illustration to the wildly active maze of George Olden's CBS design. The end result of each of these pictures was deeply felt and carefully planned and controlled. It was by no means accidental. The effect or feeling was foremost in the mind of each artist – and he never lost sight of it or let it become confused with the mechanics of drawing or composition.

Courtesy Cosmopolitan

Robert Fawcett: The design of this picture is almost literally a statement of shock, punctuated with an exclamation mark (the bedpost). The woman appears terror-stricken not merely because of her facial expression or the fact that she is clutching her throat, but also because of the sharp contrast of light and shadow. The light coming from below creates an unusual dramatic effect.



Norman Rockwell: This frightened little fellow is surrounded by a setting in which both symbol and senses play a major part. The situation is tense and dramatic, but only in an impending way, not in an active one. To create this quiet suspense, Rockwell has made horizontals and verticals dominate his picture. The only strong diagonals are found in the form of the little boy as he leans forward with fearful curiosity. The character of the setting is well established — it's poor, dirty, and unpleasant. Rockwell called on all his senses to convey this impression to us.

Albert Dorne: This is a humorous but explosive incident, and the artist has kept it in motion by emphasizing the crisp, angular shapes of the figures, treelike columns, tables, and other objects and giving them an active diagonal placement throughout the picture. There's humorous excitement here — but the kind that can be achieved only through calm, careful planning.

Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Edward Hopper — Early Sunday Morning

Courtesy Alabama Polytechnic Institute

Ben Shahn — Hunger

Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Vincent van Gogh — The Starry Night

Some thoughts on putting our feelings into pictures

Knowing what our senses and emotions can contribute to our pictures is one thing. Being able to transfer these feelings to paper is quite another. We must be able to convey our emotional reactions in visual terms — through the right choice and arrangement of lines, tones, textures, and shapes.

The three paintings on this page are excellent examples of how this can be done. Edward Hopper creates a real sense of quiet in the first picture, which shows a city street on Sunday morning, with the low light striking the buildings. There is not a car or a person to disturb the silence. To strengthen the mood, the artist has placed emphasis on horizontals and verticals. Diagonals are hard to find here.

Few artists have expressed the tragedy of hunger with greater pathos than Ben Shahn does in his picture of the starving boy. The child reaches a bony hand right out of the picture to us. His greatly enlarged head makes his body seem even more wasted by famine and malnutrition. This skillful exaggeration of perspective, combined with the artist's sensitive drawing, creates a deep feeling of compassion in the viewer.

In "The Starry Night," rather than showing the literal appearance of the night sky, Van Gogh portrays the intense, almost religious feelings it inspired in him. The forms of the cypress trees in the foreground suggest tongues of flame leaping upward. The whirling stars overhead make us feel an endless motion and excitement in the heavens. We sense that the sky and the forms of nature were a source of constant wonder to the artist.

In each of these pictures the visual means the artist used to communicate feeling seem simple and obvious. These means, however, no longer appear so simple when we try to apply them ourselves. We may be intensely interested in our subject — we may feel it deeply and experience it with all our senses — and still find real difficulty in expressing these feelings in a picture. Why and how this can happen we shall examine here.

Let's take, for example, the case of a beginner who wants to make a picture showing the noise and confusion of a busy city street. Quite correctly, he goes right to the scene to get to know his subject firsthand. He is jostled by the crowd, he listens to the roar of the traffic, he smells the exhaust gas, and soaks up every other sense impression he can. Then, excitedly, he makes sketches and takes photos of significant things. Home he goes now, to work on his picture, hoping that it will stir in all who see it the same emotions and reactions he himself has felt.

His picture, finished, falls far short of his expectations. It is technically well drawn — but it does not communicate feeling, the sense of hubbub and confusion. Nor, for the life of him, can he imagine why.

What happened to our artist has happened to many an artist before him. As soon as he began to draw, his whole concern shifted from feeling and experiencing to seeing — seeing, isolated from his other senses. Everything he did now was an effort to duplicate just the look of the scene. The smells, the sounds, the excitement were forgotten, and his attention was riveted on whether the buildings were in proportion and the details accurate, whether the cars and people were the right size and his perspective absolutely correct. These, of course, are all very important points — but they should represent just one part of the artist's concern.

Our artist, to record his feelings in a picture like this, should have asked himself questions such as these: Do these people fill enough space? Are there enough of them — are they really close together — and, above all, are they designed into a shape that conveys a sense of movement? Would more cars suggest the sounds of a busy city street better? Would the buildings contribute more if they were broken up into exciting patterns of light and dark? Questions like these would help any artist keep in view his goal of expressing his feelings in pictorial terms.

This lesson, along with our two earlier ones on the principles of composition, shows you how to express your ideas in pictures. Your job now is to take these specific principles and use them to express the emotions and sense impressions your subject produces in you. To do this successfully will take time, practice, and, above all, thought. It does for any artist — even highly skilled professionals like Norman Rockwell and Albert Dorne, who later in this lesson tell you about some of the compositional problems they encounter in their work. But, as these Faculty members demonstrate, with perseverance and careful planning you can achieve your goals just as they do, and create pictures that communicate real feeling to the viewer.

The viewpoint depends on our intentions

Every picture has a key idea that the artist wishes to communicate – a mood or center of interest that he wants the viewer to focus on. In deciding on the viewpoint from which to make our picture, we must have this key idea very much in mind. The effect we want should decide whether we will view the subject from far off, close up, or at a middle distance – from above, below, or straight on.

Which viewpoint to use is one of the first and most basic decisions we have to make in planning a composition. A carefully selected viewpoint will make our communication with the viewer faster and more effective. The viewpoint will tell him at once what the picture is about – whether it is, so to speak, a picture of a forest or of the individual trees.

Norman Rockwell's two paintings on this page demonstrate this point very forcefully. Each is essentially a picture of the same basic subject, America at the polls.

In the painting at the side, the artist has placed his entire emphasis on one small but very important aspect of Election Day – the voter trying to make up his mind in the election booth. He is viewed close up – and the viewpoint permits us to see his reflective look, his wrinkled forehead and the fingers plucking thoughtfully at his chin. The newspaper in his hand and the pamphlets in his pocket, together with his pose, tell us that he is a serious person who is concerned about the future. This near viewpoint offers a highly effective way to portray feeling and character clearly and sharply.

In the picture below we see essentially the same subject, but a much larger aspect of it. Here, because the artist wanted to show the different human types and activities at a polling place – to portray the over-all atmosphere of Election Day – he moved off and enlarged his area of focus.

Viewpoint and area of focus are basic. We must always weigh them thoughtfully in the preliminary stage of picture planning to see how they can help us put our idea across.

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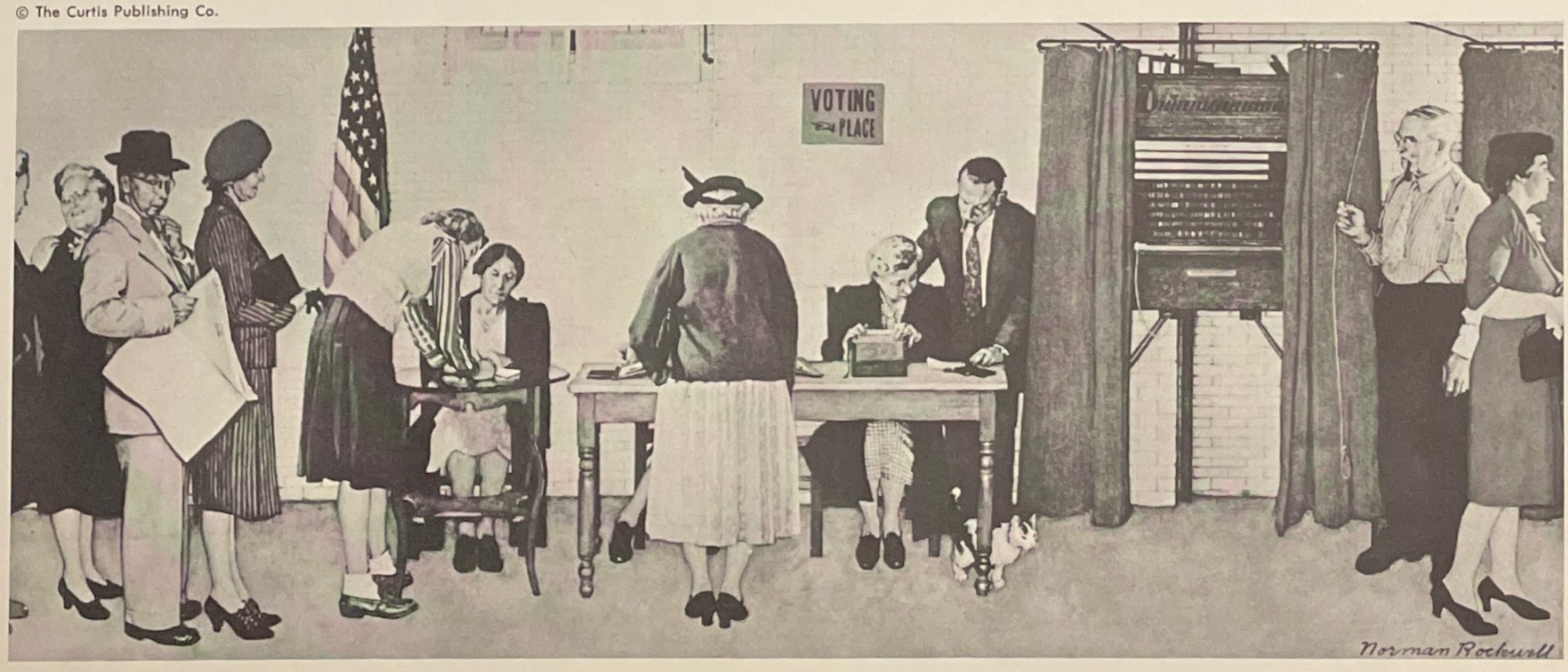
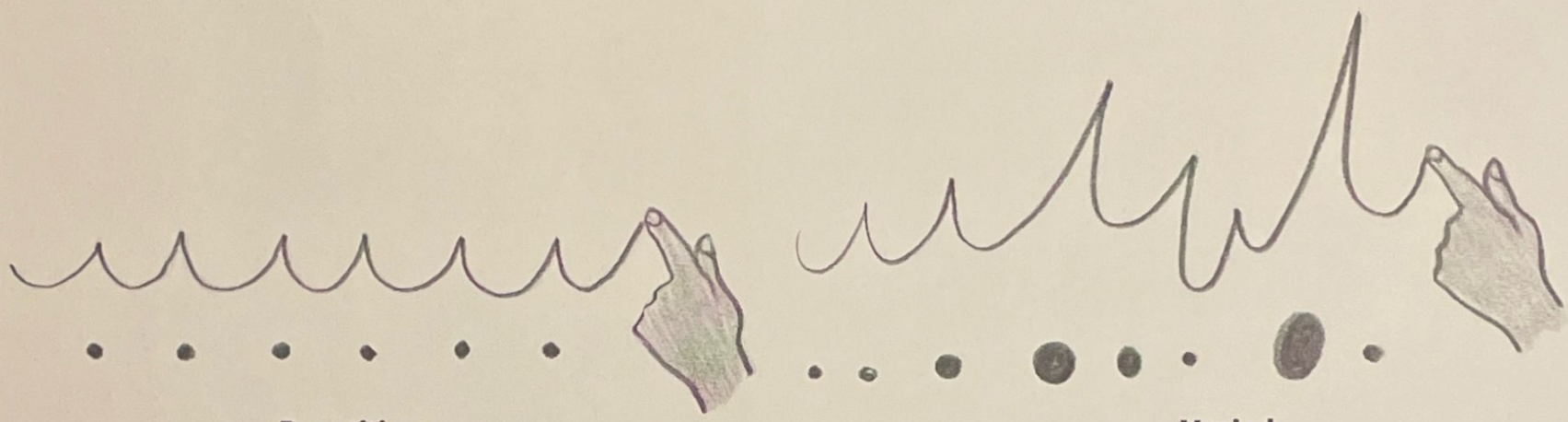


Rhythm and design

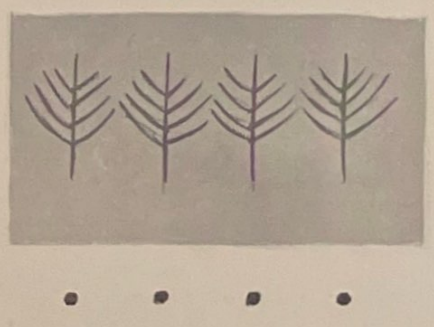
Design means many things. In its simplest sense it means one, two, or three objects repeated over and over again – as in a pattern on wallpaper, linoleum, tile in a kitchen, drapes, or even a brick wall. These designs, however, are so simple and obvious that they would become quite monotonous in a picture. Unlike a wallpaper, whose repetitious design can be relieved by furniture placed against the wall, by a window opening, or a mirror, a picture must stand alone. When we speak of design in a picture, we are still speaking of elements that are rhythmically repeated. But it is not a dull, regular repetition – it is repetition with variation. In this variation lies the difference between an ordinary decorative design and the design of a picture. A good picture must be interesting, and variety of design is one of our chief tools in making it so.



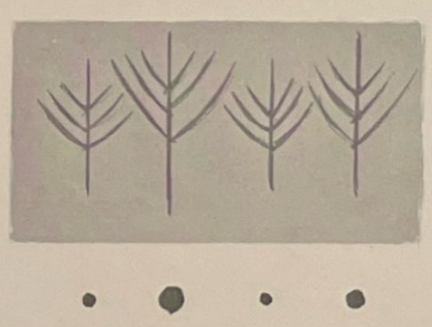
Repetitious **Varied**

An instinct of rhythm is basic in all of us. We tap our foot and keep time as we listen to a familiar piece of music. As we ride in a railroad train, the clickety-clack of the wheels on the rails is arranged into rhythms by our ear. The arts make use of this instinct for rhythm. The composer and the poet organize their tones or words into a regular, rhythmical flow of sound. And, in a similar way, the artist organizes the elements in his picture to create a rhythm. His rhythm, of course, must be appropriate for the effect he wants. Rhythms may be violent or quiet, smooth or staccato. Just as there is room for all types of rhythm in music, so there is room for an equal variety of rhythms in picture making. Once again the key to success is finding the answer to the question: What is most appropriate?

The diagrams and examples on this and the following page will give you a basis for answering this question by yourself. We will begin with the simple rhythms that are found in wallpaper and fabric designs – sheer repetition is the principle here – and then go on into variations, in which the range and meaning of the rhythm grows wider although the essential element of some similarity or repetition is not lost.

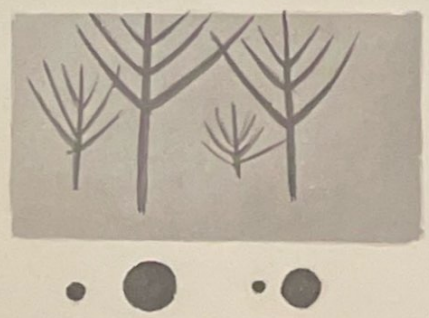


Here is a very simple wallpaper or fabric design. In it we see a single element repeated over and over monotonously. Such a design cannot hold our interest.



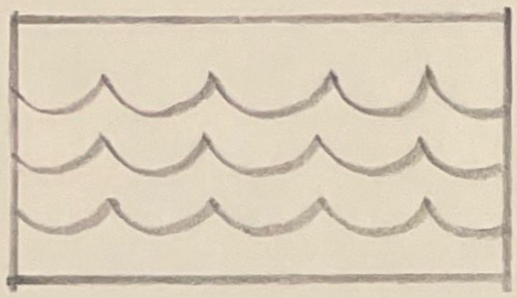
As soon as we vary two of these trees, we establish interest. Our eye stays with this simple diagram longer than with the first pattern. It's not exciting, but it's an improvement.

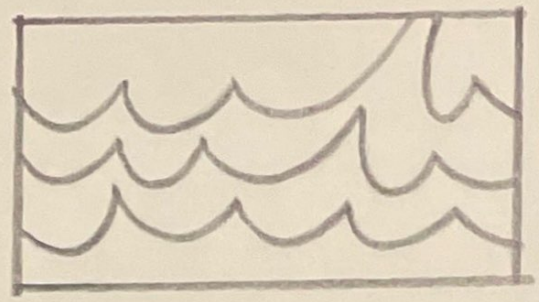
This design, with its even wider variety in the size of the similar elements, is still more interesting. New factors are the difference in the level of the trees and space intervals.



This one is even more varied. Some of the trees overlap and the interval between them is really changed. The rhythm is complicated and holds our attention longer.

Variety creates interest





Complete, exact repetition in a picture is uninteresting no matter what subject we use. At the left, for example, are three houses and three trees that repeat each other exactly. Like the uniform waves above, they fail to hold our interest for very long. Monotonous forms like these would greatly handicap the effectiveness of any picture.

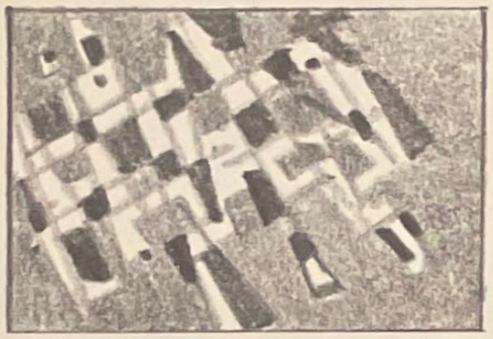
On the other hand, it doesn't take much to make this basic design more exciting. All that is required is the introduction of some variety — in the placement of the buildings, the size of the TV antennas, the size and shape of the trees. Like the irregular wave pattern at the right, the variations in interval and size hold our eye.

There are other ways of creating variety besides changes in size, shape, position and interval. Above, for example, are three windows of the same size. They might very well present a problem, so far as interest and variety are concerned, if we were faced with the job of drawing them in the front of a house. There is no need for monotony, though, if we keep in mind that there are variable elements within each of these windows. We don't have to draw all the shades at the same level, and drapes offer possibilities for change of shape as well as the amount of interior we see. Almost always opportunities like these exist in apparently monotonous subjects.

As the row of windows below demonstrates, variety and rhythm come naturally into play when we repeat elements at different depths. The change in size and the amount of detail — more detail in near objects, less in far ones — insures variety.

Overlapping offers still another way to create variety. There may be three clouds of similar size and shape in the sky or in our photographic or other reference material — but that doesn't bind us to put them in our picture sky. If anything, as artists, we are bound to keep such dull repetition out of our pictures. By overlapping we improve the design as shown above, and by varying the size and the amount of detail in each cloud, as shown at left, we help the design further.

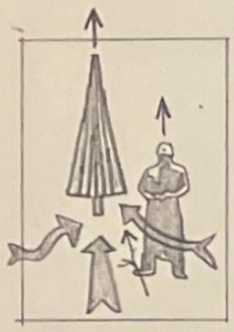
You learn to draw by drawing



For this painting of snow geese rising against the early morning sky, Fred Ludekens chose as his basic design theme a repeated pattern of dark and light on a middle gray background. Notice how carefully he has varied the size and shape of the birds and the interval between them to give the design interest.

Courtesy True Magazine

© Ladies' Home Journal



To My Beloved Wife was the title of the story for which Al Parker drew this illustration — and the theme was appropriately selected to portray a man's concern for the welfare of his family after his death. The closed umbrella pointing heavenward was the artist's inspiration from the start — and this direction is rhythmically repeated by the attitude of the man and emphasized by the upward sweep of the chairs. The moonlight that falls upon his face and around him also suggests that his thoughts go beyond this world.

Theme

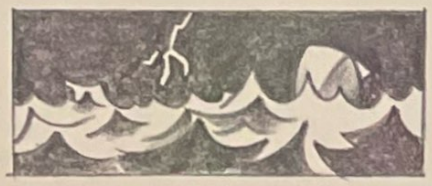
As we have observed again and again, one of the artist's main jobs is to bring order to the scene before him. He must not copy the accidental discord of nature, but should rearrange and redesign his subject until it communicates clearly and directly.

An excellent way to create order in a picture is to select a theme – a basic pattern, design, or symbol – and arrange the picture elements according to this theme.

Themes can take many forms. The illustrations on these two pages, for example, are based on a theme of repeated light and dark spots, a vertical theme, and a turbulent theme. Other pictures may be patterned on themes made up of horizontal, circular, or oval motifs. The theme might be a triangle or a pyramid, a cross or a star, or the symbol of joy or sorrow. The only limits to the kinds of themes we use are the limits imposed by our own imagination.

A well-chosen theme is not a geometric pattern that we arbitrarily force upon a story idea or situation. The theme should in every case grow logically out of the basic character of our subject. For example, if the subject suggests size – it might be an important or aggressive personality or a huge mountain – then we might select largeness as our theme and make the subject fill a large part of the picture space. If the subject suggests a feeling of monotony (it might be a drab slum tenement or an army camp), we could develop a theme of obvious regularity and dull repetition. For the tenement house we could highlight the long rows of windows, one very much like the next; for the military subject we might establish a pattern of long lines of soldiers marching or endless rows of tents. Naturally, in pictures like these the repeated forms would not be identical in shape and size but the feeling of monotonous repetition would have to be there to get the idea across.

All of the themes we picture and describe here are fairly obvious and easy to see. Often, however, themes will be more subtle. Whether you favor one kind or the other, always choose your themes thoughtfully. A well-selected theme can add greatly to the impact and feeling of your picture.



A theme of turbulence is the basis of this picture of a stampede by Fred Ludekens. We have a sense of thousands of heavy bodies rushing onward in a thundering motion that has great power and direction. To emphasize the feeling of thrust and pressure, Ludekens shows the covered wagon being tossed about on the wild, seething sea of cattle. The excitement is increased by the confused, irregular pattern of the long white horns, which echo the flash of lightning that rips through the sky.

Courtesy True Magazine

A vertical theme

Here is a striking, forceful picture — a painting of a woman and an infant in the hands of the Indians. The basic theme is a vertical one, as in the painting by Al Parker on the facing page, but the effect is somewhat different. The dominant pattern of straight, upward-reaching trees creates a strong feeling of spiritual strength, which is repeated in the undaunted upright figure of the woman captive. This picture owes much of its success to the care and sensitivity with which the artist, Jan Balet, has woven together the elements of theme, symbol, and rhythm. It is expressive because it is well planned.

Theme

Symbol

Rhythm

Theme: Here is the basic theme. Despite the extremely strong repetition of the soaring tree trunks, variety is also present — enough variety to avoid monotony and set up an intriguing rhythm of sizes and intervals, as suggested by the large and small dots under the diagram.

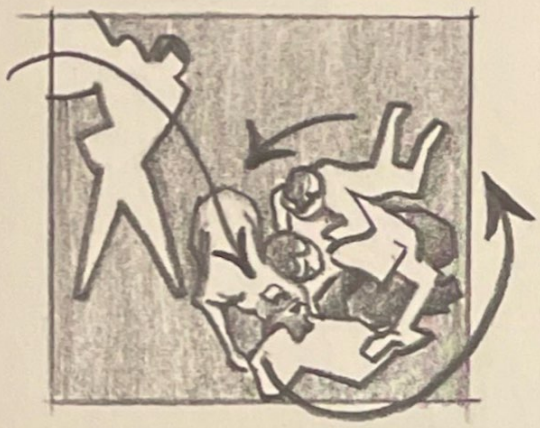
Viewpoint: Balet has backed off far enough to present a view of the Indians as a group rather than as individuals. He has "threaded" them horizontally through the trees as a foil for the soaring pines.

Theme, feeling and symbolism in pictures

Courtesy Carnation Co.

A gay, active feeling

The entire mood of this picture by Austin Briggs is one of vigorous fun. Except for a small part of the background, all the shapes and lines here are busy and active. The artist has arranged his forms into a kind of ball that seems to roll around and around. To strengthen his theme of action and excitement, in the figures he has stressed diagonal lines and shapes and mobile curves. In informal horseplay like this, some of the figures might briefly assume static vertical or horizontal shapes, but Briggs has carefully avoided them to emphasize the effect of movement.



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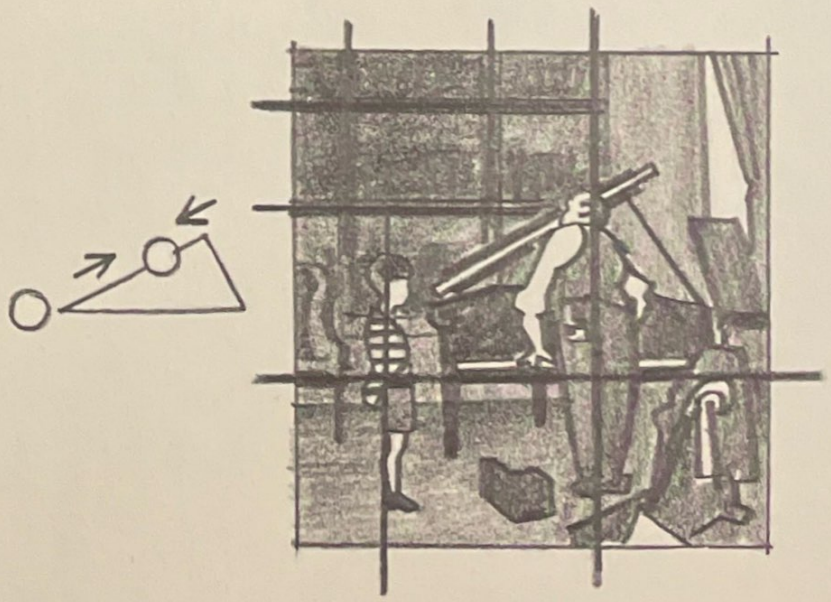
The feeling of silence

Norman Rockwell's chief concern here is to create a feeling of absolute quiet as the piano tuner cocks his head and listens for the next note. The sense of quiet is strengthened by the generally close values throughout the picture. As indicated by the outline diagram, the uplifted piano top is brilliantly used by Rockwell for two purposes — to tie the boy and tuner together and to force our eye to the piano tuner's face and ear as he waits for the sound of the key.

In contrast to the active, diagonal quality of the lines in the Briggs picture above, this one has a theme based on dominant horizontal and vertical lines. These can be found throughout the picture. Even the lines of the figures are mostly vertical. Notice that Rockwell has carefully placed the window at the right to stop the movement of the viewer's eye out of the picture, where the line of the piano top would otherwise lead it.



Courtesy CBS, Inc.

Combining careful representation with straight symbolism

This picture by David Stone Martin provides a dramatic example of how we can express a feeling in visual terms. The carefully drawn head of the man creates a definite illusion of reality. There is a striking contrast between this convincing head and the rest of the picture, which is loosely drawn and suggestive — the vibrant inner emotion made visual through the artist's skill. We cannot fail to grasp the man's nervous fear, his sense of danger and impending tragedy. These feelings are vigorously suggested by the zigzag wash tones that surround the fugitive figure and become a part of him.

Note how closely this suggestion of nervousness parallels the picture of this same sensation shown at left, which we saw earlier in this lesson.

These two faces inside the heart shape represent the goal I am striving toward. The key idea I want to get across is the old woman's love for the child.

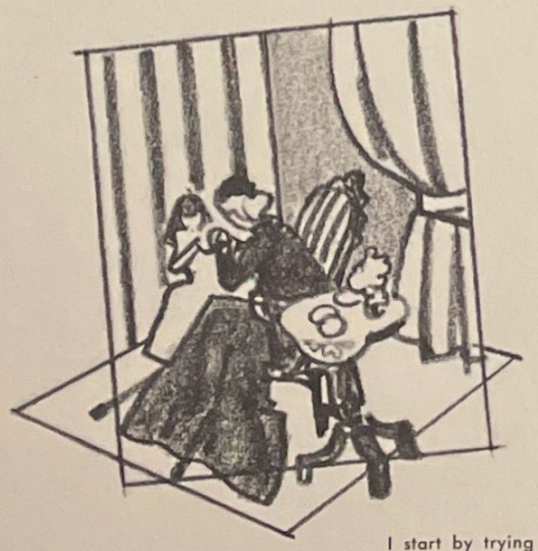
Norman Rockwell

A picture with feeling

All of my pictures begin with the basic idea of the relationship of people to each other. The picture whose case history I am going to tell you about here is no exception.

Right from the start I know that what I want to show is the tender love and affection of an old lady for a little girl. This is the fundamental image and, no matter what I do as I progress, I don't want to lose it. With this in mind, I start out to develop a composition, doing everything I can to keep it tender. I feel that I want the final picture to have a kind of needlepoint quality — to re-create a sweet and old-fashioned mood, a mood of long ago.

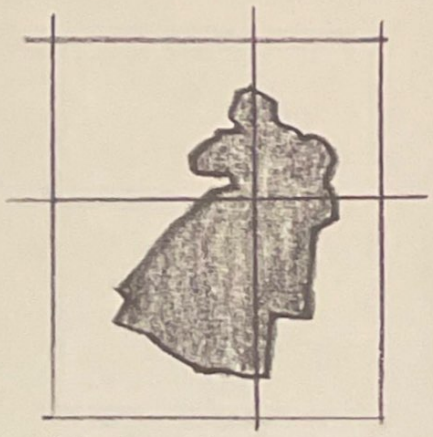
Although I didn't actually make the pictures below as a preliminary to the job, they do explain my thinking and, even more important, my feelings toward the problem.



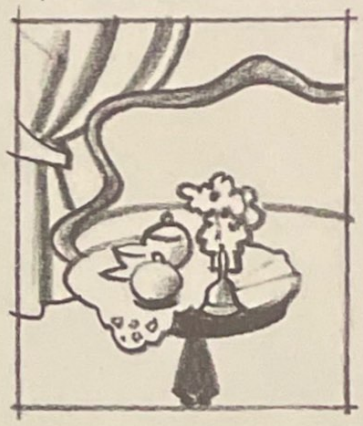
I start by trying to establish my figures in a setting. Here are the first few ideas. In the first one the figures are simply too small — the background takes over. In the second one the old lady becomes too important — she's framed by the curtains and the girl is almost pushed out of the composition.

The third one is a little better, but now the table, which should be incidental, seems too prominent — it's right in the middle of the picture. The old lady is too important as well.

I still think I've got the right idea with this setting, but I just haven't made the best use of it yet.



I like the way these two figures fit together and their placement in relation to the border — but the surroundings have such strong and active rhythms that they detract from the figures themselves. That drape, for example, and the snakelike curve of the settee frame really bother me, and so does the busy pattern of objects on the table.



I also begin to feel that the table, right smack in the foreground, is still too important. It jumps right out of the picture. The whole thing becomes a picture of a table — with incidental figures!

I think I have a solution

This arrangement seems to me to be a good one. For one thing I like the intricate shape of the old settee, particularly the flow and movement of the frame. It could actually act as sort of an old-fashioned picture frame, holding the two figures in.

This one might have worked very well. But, after studying it for a while, I realize that what I really have is still a picture of a table with figures behind it. The table is in too prominent a position. Now, also, that settee that I was so fond of begins to bother me because it is too insistent. That intriguing frame becomes too active a line — so active, in fact, that it is completely out of character with the quiet relationship between the old lady and the little girl. It seems to have a feel of violence to it. This composition looked so good, to begin with — but it isn't the solution after all, and I have to try another tack.

The final composition

I realize that the table has got to move behind the figures, where, as an incidental prop, it logically belongs. As soon as I shift it there the whole thing begins to add up.

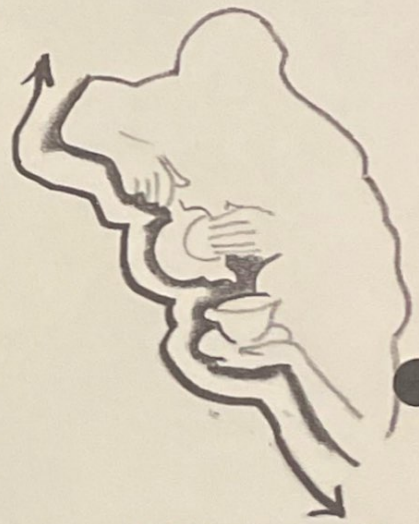
Almost at the same time, I abandon the busy shape of the settee in favor of a simpler chair for the old lady and a stool for the girl. Now the attention really focuses where it belongs — on the two figures. In addition to this, the old lady's two canes, uninterrupted by the table, carry the eye very directly and strongly to the center of interest — her action of pouring the tea into the child's cup.

With the table gone, however, I do feel a need for something at the bottom of the picture. What can be more logical than the girl's sunbonnet, picking up the value of her dress?

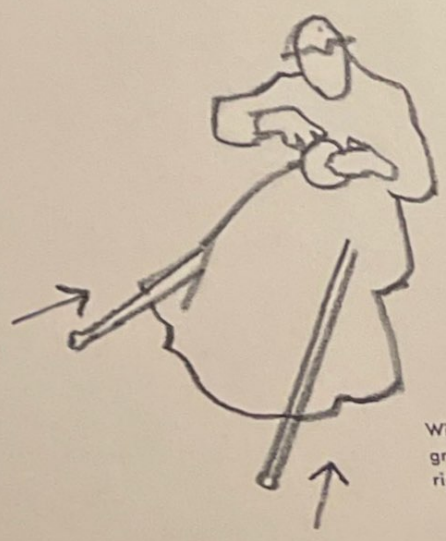
I find the new position for the table not only keeps it subordinate — but actually now the whole arrangement flows smoothly together to the center of interest. See how your eye follows down from the objects on the table and along the woman's arm to the child's cup. The jagged, twisting silhouette of the light hands, teapot, and cup against the dark of the old lady's dress holds the interest here, where it belongs.

The composition is certainly different from what it was at the start. But I haven't lost sight of the original idea — the love of the old lady for the young girl, symbolized in the heart-framed sketch at the start.

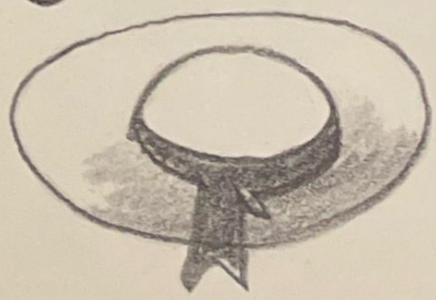
Although the picture contains lots of irregular shapes and designs, the most compelling ones are right here along the hands, teapot and cup. The busy, twisting contour at this spot helps focus the attention where it should be.



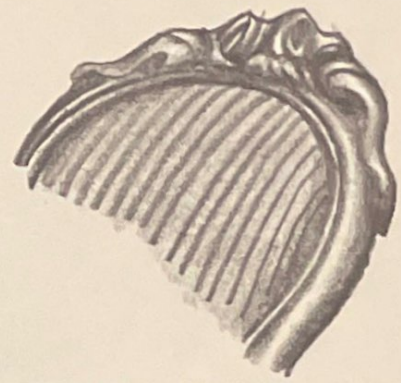
See the rhythmic flow of movement that starts with the dishes on the table, continues down along the arm and teapot, and brings our attention to the child's teacup. This control of direction is important to keep our eye from wandering to less important parts of the picture.



With the table removed to the background, the canes carry our eye right up to the center of interest.



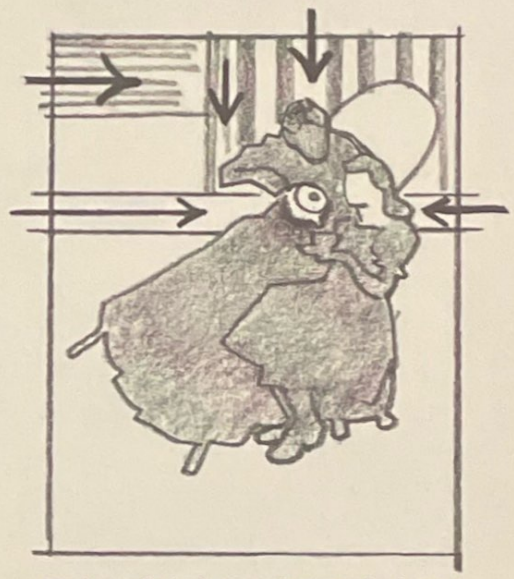
The diagonal movement of line through the center of interest is strengthened and held together by the placement of the table and sunbonnet. I chose these shapes because they echo, in essence, the oval or circular theme of the pot and saucer, creating an interesting rhythm by their repetition and variation in size.



This is what the back of the chair looked like, with its actual lights and darks. If I'd left it as sharply modeled as this, it would have distracted greatly from the heads.

© The Curtis Publishing Co.

In terms of texture, the old, dark, mellow dress of the woman contrasts sharply with the crisp, bright light dress of the young girl. I used these contrasting textures to point up the difference between age and youth.



See how all the lines work to guide the eye to the teapot. The venetian blinds lead across — this movement is picked up by the wallpaper, which leads down — and the table and hands, of course, have been discussed before. The position of the baseboard is very important. Notice that it's right at the level of the teapot, so that the attention is guided inward from both left and right at the most effective level for reaching the focal point quickly.

This is it

Here is the way the finished picture turned out. One thing you should notice is the softening and holding back of values and patterns in places where they might compete with the main action. For example, in the background I've used a striped wallpaper which is very quiet. Any directional movement here is at least down toward the figures — not away from them, as was the case with the drape at the start. The pattern on the rug would be stronger in the real rug, but I have subdued it quite a bit because a busy, active pattern would surely draw attention away from the figures.

The same applies to the carved chair back. The real chair back, in a strong light or a photo, would show lots of sharp detail and busy carved shapes. All these are held down, though, and simplified so that the viewer will focus on the figures.

1 An old man dying, with his heirs waiting expectantly — like vultures — that was the symbolic way I saw the picture idea.

ALBERT DORNE

Using a theme symbol in composition

Here is a case history of a story illustration which should prove to you that symbols and feelings, clearly expressed, can be one of the strongest points of a successful picture. This story illustration has to do with an old farmer who is lying on his death bed, surrounded by his greedy sons. They are waiting eagerly for him to die so they can divide his worldly possessions.

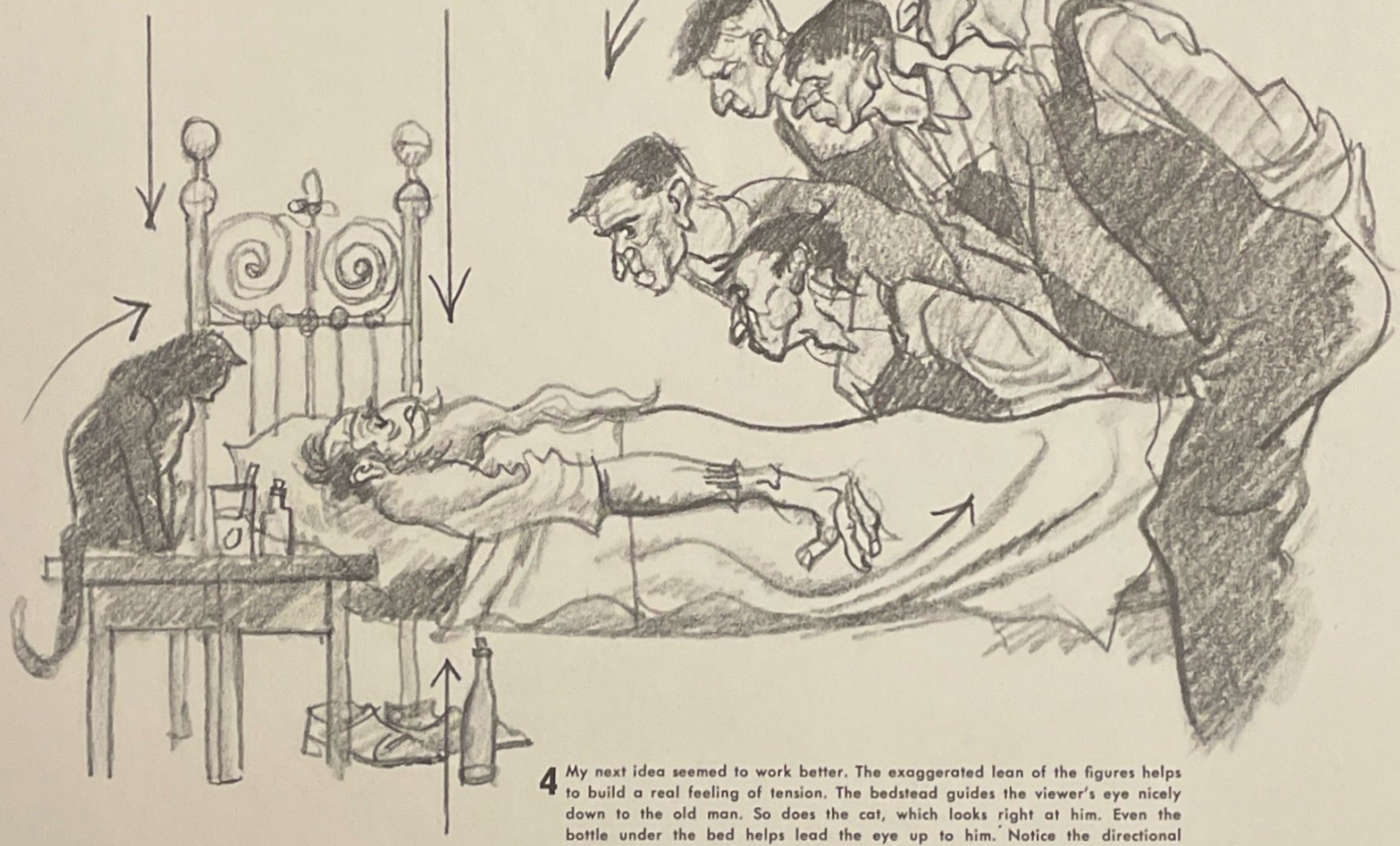
The story wasn't a tragedy, though. It had sort of a macabre whimsy about it, and I approached the making of the picture with that in mind. I thought of the sons as a bunch of vultures hovering over the old man and, just as Norman Rockwell explains in his demonstration, once I decided that this was the right theme I stuck to it all through the development of the picture. If I did lose it at points, I always came back to it.

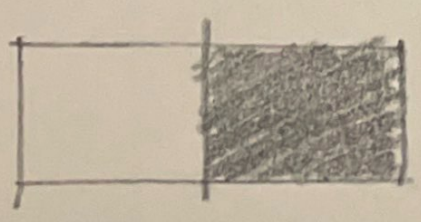
I was so intrigued by this idea of the vultures sitting around the bed that I even thought of putting vultures' heads on the sons. That would have been a "stopper" in the magazine. I called up the art editor and told him what I had in mind. He agreed it would be effective — but also pointed out that it would be out of line with the magazine's policy. Although I had to abandon the drawing of the vultures' heads, I didn't abandon the symbolism.

2 I began with some quick rough sketches in which I attempted to get the feeling of vultures in the forms of the sons. My first effort showed them looking down at the old man. As I studied my sketch, it no longer appeared very exciting to me. Despite the outstretched necks, the figures didn't seem to be doing anything in particular.

3 Now I moved on to another idea. I thought I'd line the sons up more as pallbearers, as the diagram suggests. (Here, again, another symbol was working in my mind.) However, I felt this arrangement strung the figures out too much and, above all, placed too much attention in the foreground. The emphasis shouldn't be here — it should be right on the old man. Moreover, this lineup of the figures was dull and monotonous. It didn't do enough, although I pulled one figure out at the head of the line so the form on the bed would be framed and the eye would quickly find it.

I crossed this one out and tried again.





4 My next idea seemed to work better. The exaggerated lean of the figures helps to build a real feeling of tension. The bedstead guides the viewer's eye nicely down to the old man. So does the cat, which looks right at him. Even the bottle under the bed helps lead the eye up to him. Notice the directional lines created by the folds at the foot of the bed and by the backs and heads of the figures that curve over toward the old man. Now look back at the cat and observe the second role it plays here — it helps hold in the left side of the composition and, in effect, repeats the general attitude of the sons.

The figure of the dying old man is weak and frail — and he is made to seem even more so by the dark, hovering mass of the sons at the opposite end. This is the idea I set out to express — the victim surrounded by birds of prey.

The only thing that bothers me now is the fact that the picture splits too much down the center. As the diagram indicates, the old man is on one side, the massive group of his sons on the other. Even the dark form of the cat at the left does not really help. This composition isn't quite interesting enough.

5 Here is the next version I tried. You can see I've solved the problem of the split composition by moving some of the brothers around to the left side. I've removed the black cat because I felt this well-known symbol of bad luck interfered with the basic symbol I was trying to get across. I also decided that it would be more intriguing if the old man's head didn't show at all — just his two long, bony hands, caricatured enough to suggest what the rest of him might look like.

I still wasn't satisfied with this picture. I felt it had lost the vulture-like quality I had started with. Besides, the central area between the left and right sides was disturbingly empty. And, as the small diagram suggests, the base of the composition seems to be running downhill.

6 This is my final composition. I introduced the chest of drawers in the background to solve the problem of the open space and tie all the figures together. Notice also that I have moved them all much closer together to make the atmosphere more oppressive. The sons literally hem the old man in. Those lean bodies bending expectantly over the bed help put across the feeling of vultures hovering over their prey — the feeling which I wanted to create from the outset. I think the long, scrawny hands, beaklike noses, and general shapes of the heads also come close to suggesting vultures and people at the same time. Finally, to keep the vignetted picture from "floating" on the page, I tied the main forms to the bottom margin by introducing the rug.

The finished illustration

Here's what the picture looked like when I delivered it to the art editor of the magazine. Notice that I have tried to retain a heavier weight and darker tones in the hovering figures of the sons. The old man is still generally light and frail beneath the bedclothes. The tone of the bed is kept light to emphasize this.

For me, this job teaches an important point. And that point is: Choose an appropriate, effective symbol – here it was the vultures – and stay with it. Regardless of how much you rearrange or discard, never lose sight of the basic feeling or symbol you want to communicate.

Courtesy Robert Blauner Collection, New York

Wild joy: The wild exaltation of the newly crowned champion and his trainer is powerfully presented in this picture by Fletcher Martin. The explosive design, with its strong contrasts of tone and its angular lines and shapes, is perfectly suited to the subject.

The feeling must be there

The pictures on this page, each by a different artist, vary greatly in subject, technique, and purpose. All, however, have one thing in common – they arouse an emotional response in us. This ability to communicate feeling is the mark of the successful picture. To put emotion into our art we cannot be indifferent to our subject – we must feel it with our senses, our mind and heart, our whole being. Only then can we communicate to the viewer the emotional richness and meaning of our living experience.

© Street & Smith Publications, Inc.; reprinted from Charm

Helplessness: This picture illustrates a line from a story: "She was lying there as an animal in a trap lies." Ben Shahn makes the bed overwhelming in size so that the bars tower over the helpless, frail figure and shut it in. Here is feeling, vividly expressed with the simplest of means — which are often the hardest to use well.

Courtesy Museum of Modern Art

Fatigue: In "The Washerwoman" Honoré Daumier has used the drooping symbol of fatigue or sorrow to express his compassion for this tired woman and her small child. Both figures are painted in dark tones to emphasize still further the grimness of their lot.

Gaiety: Here is a light, happy mood. The gay Maypole dancers, swirling ribbons, fluffy clouds, and blossoming tree — all of these convey a sense of springtime gaiety in this painting by Doris Lee.

FAMOUS ARTISTS COURSE
Student work
Lesson 14
Advanced pictorial composition

HOW TO PRACTICE AND PREPARE FOR THIS LESSON

Our purpose in this lesson is to show you that when you make a picture you should use not only your eyes but all of your other senses as well. By applying all of your resources (including the principles you learned in Lessons 3 and 8) you can succeed in expressing your mood and feeling clearly and strongly to the people who see your pictures.

Follow these study and practice suggestions before you do your assignment:

1. Relying only on the elements of shape, line, and value, make many small abstract sketches that convey definite feelings and emotions, as in the pictures on pages 6 and 7.

2. Use the symbols you see at the top of page 8 to create a number of small rough figure compositions with various moods -- excitement, sorrow, peace, happiness, etc.

3. Remember, portraying just the appearance of your subject isn't enough. After studying page 12, make drawings in which you try to bring out the feel or texture of various objects. Make other sketches in which you bring out the effect of sound (page 13) and scent (page 14).

4. A good understanding of rhythm and design can help every picture you make. Do some small, rough sketches in which you emphasize these elements, as demonstrated on pages 18 and 19.

5. Create some compositions with strong, definite themes such as those on pages 20, 21 and 22. These need not be finished drawings, but the theme of each one should be obvious.

THE ASSIGNMENT YOU ARE TO SEND IN FOR CRITICISM

ASSIGNMENT 1. Illustrate ONE of the four situations described below. Make your picture about 13 x 17 inches on a sheet of 15 x 20-inch illustration board. It may be either a vertical, horizontal or vignetted picture. Do it in any medium you wish but do not use color.

1A. You have been asked to illustrate a story for a man's magazine. The important thing to capture here is the emotional state and reaction of each of the characters. Handle composition, lighting, values and edges with a view to presenting the situation as powerfully as possible.

The art director has suggested a scene showing two men seated in a small, dingy hotel room, playing cards at a small table. They are obviously rough and uneducated. Both of them have discarded their jackets, though one still wears his hat pushed back on his head. Their clothing is flashy, but not expensive. The hall door has been thrust open suddenly, and a pretty blonde in a slinky evening dress is pointing a revolver at them.

1B. A woman's magazine has assigned you to illustrate the following situation. Remember, in drawing this picture, that it must appeal primarily to feminine readers.

The cab screeched around the corner and came to a sudden halt in front of Le coq agile. For another moment Michael held Laura's hand. Her blue eyes flashed a smile half teasing, half frightened. He longed to run his hands through her silken blonde hair, to feel the warmth of her in his arms. If only she weren't such a child! he thought to himself. And then they were standing in front of the little restaurant, with the soft mist of spring rain falling quietly around them. The dim light of the old iron lantern above the door cast long shadows across the wet cobblestones and the funny little sign with its perky red rooster swung quietly in the gentle spring breeze. She came only to his shoulder, and she stretched on tiptoe as she reached her arms around him. It can't happen, he thought. I musn't let it happen. But his lips found hers, and his arms tightened around her. For a long moment they stood there. Then she was gazing up at him again, a strange new look of wonder in her eyes. "Michael," she said quietly, "I love you."

(over, please)

1C. Here is a story situation you are to illustrate for a woman's magazine. Use your imagination and interpret it in your own way.

It was April Fools' Day. Jennifer, 5 years old, went through the fields to her grandmother's house to play a trick on her. Going up the ancient garden walk and under the arbor her grandmother had made by hand to hold her climbing roses, Jennifer spied, lying on the ground, the bronze Victorian clock that was always in the parlor. She ran to it and in picking it up noticed that the back of the clock was open and the money her grandmother kept hidden there was gone! Jennifer felt sure that something terrible must have happened.

1D. Assume that the art director of a book publishing concern wants you to submit a sample illustration for the following nursery rhyme.

SIMPLE SIMON

Simple Simon met a pieman
Going to the fair.
Says Simple Simon to the pieman,
"Let me taste your wares."

Says the pieman to Simple Simon
"Show me first your penny."
Says Simple Simon to the pieman,
"Indeed I have not any."

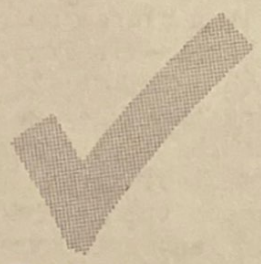
Simple Simon went a-fishing
For to catch a whale.
All the water he had got
Was in his mother's pail.

Simple Simon went to look
If plums grew on a thistle.
He pricked his fingers very much,
Which made poor Simon whistle.

Select one or more of the 4 stanzas of the rhyme above to illustrate. Study illustrations in children's books to get a general idea of how they are handled. Pick any style you wish but do not use color. You may treat this as a single picture, one or more decorative spot drawings, or an entire page design.

Mark the ONE drawing you send in -- ASSIGNMENT 1 (A, B, C or D).

We will judge your work for this assignment on how well you succeed in getting across the theme and the mood of the situation and the emotions of the person or persons involved in it.



Check
before mailing

IMPORTANT: Be sure to letter your name, address and student number neatly at the lower left-hand corner of your drawing. In the lower right corner, place the lesson number and assignment number.

Your lesson carton should contain:

Assignment 1 (A, B, C or D)
1 Return shipping label filled out completely

Mail this carton to:
FAMOUS ARTISTS COURSE, WESTPORT, CONN.